

Rational Discourse, Logical Reasoning, And The Internet

Preface

The advent of modern, accessible, often impersonal, and rapid means of communication such as the Internet, and now 'social media' and 'podcasts', has allowed the widespread dissemination by not only individuals of their personal opinions, of rumours, but also of propaganda by groups, by organizations, and by governments, where by propaganda is meant a concerted effort to distribute a particular point of view, or belief, or doctrine, or a particular interpretation of events or of people or of an individual.

It has become apparent that, in this milieu where anonymous individuals can express their personal opinions, make allegations, and rant, that the civilized rules of rational discourse, of debate, and of logical reasoning, are often if not mostly ignored, with propaganda often assumed by many individuals to be fact because they either cannot be bothered to check its veracity or they do not for whatever reason possess the instinct for not only doubting what they read or hear but also doubting the motives of those distributing propaganda or vehemently expressing their personal opinions.

Presented here are some guides to the logical reasoning that is the foundation of rational discourse and debate, and thus to the fallacies that propagandists and opinionated individuals commit, knowingly or unknowingly, and to some of the techniques, such as the big lie technique and the repetition of tropes, that they, again knowingly or unknowingly, use. Also presented, in the appendix, is a modern trope that has been circulated on the Internet for years.

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Big Lie Technique

The große Lüge (Big Lie) propaganda technique is where a lie or allegation – or several lies or allegations – about a person, or persons, or group, is or are repeated so often by so many and by various means that a large proportion of people accept the lie or lies or allegation(s) as fact even though nothing probative in support of such lies and allegations is ever presented.

The technique is mainly based upon the Fallacy Of Ad Populum which is when a person either 'follows the crowd' and believes or claims that because so many others have claimed or believe something it is probably true, or when they are convinced, usually emotively, by a propagandist or politician or by some populist speaker that something is true or that someone or some many are guilty or culpable.

Trope

"Where the Trope is far fetch'd, and hard, 'tis fit for nothing but to puzzle the Understanding", John Dryden, Juvenal (1697)

Trope: a figure of speech (verbal and written) which is far fetched; a motif, a motive or theme, that represents something which is illogical (such as a fallacy of reasoning) or which is unproven or hearsay or propaganda. The fallacies of reasoning include the appeal to authority and ad populum.

One example of a trope in common use is belief in and the propagation of a phantasy about a person; which phantasy, given the nature of phantasies, does not require any evidence to sustain it or for it to be believed.

Fairness And Jurisprudence

In the lands of the West, as often elsewhere in the world, the virtue of fairness has for centuries been admired with its cultivation in the individual regarded as a necessity for a civilized, cultured, society, based as the virtue was on restrained personal behaviour. The virtue was enshrined in one of the principles of Western jurisprudence: that the burden of proof is on the person who accuses not on the accused. Hence the fairness of the presumption of innocence until probative evidence proves otherwise.

The civilized rule, the fair thing to do, was that unless a person had done their own research using primary source material or had personal direct contemporaneous experience of an event or had extensive personal experience of a group, or personally knew a person over an extended period of time, then they reserved their judgment and did not venture forth, did not publicly give, their opinion. In respect of a person, accused of something or the subject of rumours, they gave them the benefit of the doubt until probative evidence proved otherwise.

Probative Evidence

Probative evidence is evidence which provides proof regarding a claim or an assertion or reveals the facts about an event or an occurrence or which on the balance of probability provides such proof.

While most often used in a legal sense in a trial in an established Court of Law, the term is also applicable in the matter of scholarly research using primary sources concerning an event (historical or otherwise) or concerning a person.

Scholarly

To be learned, to be a scholar in the traditional sense, is to have a profound

knowledge gained by individual study. The criteria of scholarship are: (i) a detailed, meticulous, unbiased original research on and concerning a specific topic or topics or subject or person undertaken over a period of time, usually a year or more in duration and involving primary source material; (ii) an ability to be able to read primary sources in their original language; and (iii) a rational assessment of the knowledge acquired by such research, with such conclusions about the topic, topics, or subject being the logical result of the cumulative scholarly learning so acquired. If the researcher cannot read primary sources in their original language and has to rely on the translations of others then their conclusions are not original and not scholarly just as if they commit logical fallacies - such as the fallacy of Incomplete Evidence - then their conclusions are also not scholarly.

Fallacy Of Appeal To Authority

The fallacy of appeal to authority, also known as the fallacy of *Argumentum ad Verecundiam*, is somewhat misunderstood in this age of the Internet. It is not only citing or quoting a person or persons who is/are regarded, by the person citing or quoting or by others, as an authority or 'expert' on a subject but also citing or quoting the opinion given by some institution, or 'policy/advisory group' or similar, on a subject, regardless of whether or not the 'expert' or institution or whatever has their opinion published by some means or some medium regarded as 'mainstream', academic, or 'respectable' or authoritative.

The crux of the fallacy is a reliance by someone or by some others on who or what is regarded in a particular society as an authority on or as having a detailed or 'expert' knowledge of a subject or subjects.

Thus a statement such as the fallacy of appeal to authority "is when the opinion of a non-expert on a topic is used as evidence" is itself fallacious because although it appears to be a decisive statement regarding 'authority' it is logically not so having not only restricted the fallacy to those are not 'experts' but does not define what an 'expert' or a 'false expert' is or are or who or what person or institution, or 'policy/advisory group' or similar has the 'authority' to declare someone an 'expert' or a 'false expert' in a certain subject or subjects, and from whence a person or an institution, or 'policy/advisory group' or similar derives their own authority to make such declarations.

The corollary of the appeal to authority is personal research by scholarly means of a subject using primary sources.

Primary Sources

Primary sources include contemporaneous manuscripts, letters, diaries, memoirs, personal journals, interviews, speeches, and other materials individuals used to describe (i) events in which they were participants or

observers, and (ii) ideas or creations - such as a philosophy, music, literature, or art-work - which they were responsible for. Hence in the matter of a philosophy such as that of Heidegger the primary sources are his published writings, authenticated recordings or transcriptions of his speeches/lectures, and authenticated unpublished manuscripts if any. The writings, opinions, and conclusions of others about that philosophy, and other translations of his work, are secondary sources, with compilations of quotations from such secondary sources, a tertiary source.

Fallacy Of Ad Populum

This is when a person either 'follows the crowd' and believes or claims that because so many others have claimed or believe something it is probably true, or when they are convinced, usually emotively, by a propagandist or politician or by some populist speaker that something is true or that someone or some many are guilty or culpable.

Fallacy Of Argumentum ad Hominem

Argumentum ad hominem is when the character and/or the motives and/or the identity of the person presenting an argument is/are maligned or called into question often in an attempt to deflect attention away from the topic being discussed or from the opponents failure to answer questions asked of them or provide the evidence they were asked to provide.

Fallacy of Composition

Also known as the Fallacy of Illicit Transference. This is an example of equivocation, and is when a generalization is made from a few specific instances or examples with the generalization then applied to pejoratively describe or malign a group or organization or person.

Fallacy Of The False Cause

Generally referred to by the Latin phrase *non causa pro causa*. This fallacy is the assumption that one thing is the cause of another without any logical reasoning.

Fallacy Of Incomplete Evidence

Also known as the fallacy of suppressed evidence. This is when evidence which disproves or may disprove a claim or conclusion is not considered either deliberately (suppressed evidence) or because of a lack of detailed and scholarly research.

Appendix A Modern Trope

A relevant example of a modern trope prevalent on the Internet and used by propagandists with a certain ideological agenda is the phantasy about David Myatt and Anton Long.

The phantasy is not only that DM=AL, but also (i) that since AL promoted deception and misdirection, DM is deceptive with DM's post-2012 writings about rejecting extremism and neo-nazism and about his philosophy of patheismathos therefore deceptive, part of a diabolical plan, and (ii) that anyone who criticizes the phantasy or asks for evidence that DM=AL or who writes about Myatt in any positive way is DM, and (iii) that DM spends every day searching for his name on the internet and on social media, and (iv) he posts on social media using a variety of pseudonyms in order to contradict the phantasy and post links to his post-2012 writings, and (v) that there is an academic consensus that DM=AL, and (vi) that, contrary to jurisprudence, it is for Myatt to prove that he is not AL and not for them to prove that he is AL.

The fact that the phantasy has been publicly discredited ^[1] has not prevented people from believing it nor stopped the propagandists and others from disseminating it by means of the Internet and otherwise.

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[1] <https://archive.org/download/dmyatt-equals-anton-long/dmyatt-equals-anton-long.pdf>